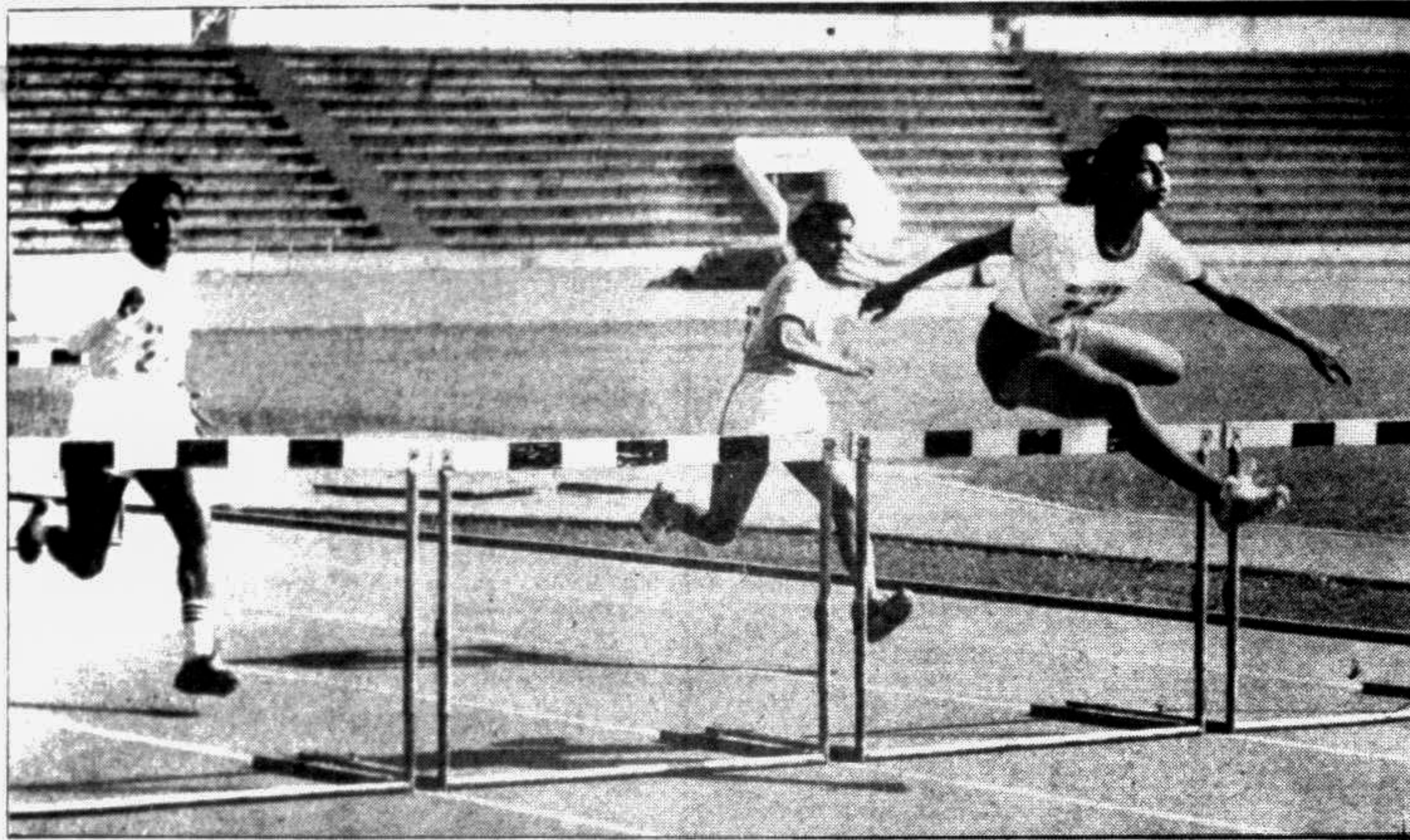


WEEKEND SPORTS WEEKEND



Rokeya Begum of Bangladesh Customs (R) Wednesday shattered the women's 100m hurdles record in the national athletics meet which concluded at the Army Stadium yesterday. —Photo Mohsin



Shelfali Rani Dey of Ansars (L) wins the women's 800m gold, ahead of BTMC's Sumita Goswami (R) on the inaugural day of the national championships Monday. —Star photo

Barcelona Olympics 1992

Preparations proceed on schedule



The Montjuic Stadium... site for the opening and closing ceremonies.

BARCELONA (Spain), Feb 14: Optimism is as high as the twin tower blocks which dominate the site of Barcelona's new Olympic village that the Catalan capital will be ready and waiting for the 1992 Olympic Games, reports Reuter.

"Everything is going ahead on schedule," said Barcelona's socialist mayor Pasqual Maragall, for whom the staging of the Olympics represents another plank in the progressive urban and cultural regeneration of this dynamic port city.

But any euphoria is tempered by continuing concern over questions of cost, accommodation and security.

With thoughts of the Gulf war in mind, Maragall says: "I think the Barcelona Olympics would mark a truce which launches a new era of peace in the world."

But he added: "We are totally aware of the threat of terrorism, of course."

There is more of a threat now, but there will also be more response. We have the best police and the best technicians working on security."

The government last month announced that it will draft 15,000 extra police and paramilitary civil guards in to Catalonia for the Olympics—50 per cent more than originally planned.

On July 25, 1992, some 15,000 competitors, coaches and officials will be gathered for the start of 15 days of unique effort in the world's greatest sporting festival.

And organisers have already admitted that spectators will have to stay up to an hour's drive away from the stadium because of the number of rooms already earmarked for people involved with the Games.

The Olympic stadium, completely refurbished within the original 1992 Sandstone Facade, blends handsomely with the imposing walls and domes of the national palace just below it.

The stadium had a disastrous inauguration with the World Cup athletics of September, 1989, when Barcelona's heaviest rainstorms in 11 years flooded the track and stands and reduced events to near farce.

Millions of dollars have been spent on improving drainage in case nature should string again in 1992.

Palau Sant Jordi, designed by Japanese architect Arta Isozaki to popular acclaim and proudly described by locals as the jewel in the Olympic crown, has already staged sports and cultural events, including rock music concerts.

Four million tickets went

on sale in Spain in early February with a further 700,000 to be sold abroad.

"All the sports venues will be ready by this summer," said Pedro Palacios, Press Chief of the Barcelona Olympics Organising Committee (COOB).

"We aim to hold some 20 international competitions in several Olympic sports later this year to test ourselves out,

these will allow us maybe to make some mistakes and give us checkpoints for our organisation," Palacios said.

The main Olympic Complex, with the Olympic stadium, the indoor arena of Palau Sant Jordi, the Olympic swimming pool and other facilities, sits on a plateau just below the summit of Montjuic (Jew's

mount), with a spectacular Panorama of the city below.

Giant escalators are planned to carry spectators up the steep slopes to the complex.

Just where all those spectators will live during the Games remains to be seen—at least five and possibly as many as 12 new hotels are planned but worries persist that too few of them will be ready in time.

"Tina Turner thought it was fabulous," said local journalist. But the most dramatic project is the Olympic village which will house about half of the 50,000-strong Olympic "family" of athletes, coaches, back-up staff, officials and sponsors.

For this Barcelona is building a brand new residential area by the sea, close to the city centre, much of it on reclaimed land, complete with apartment blocks, green

zones, shopping centres and sports facilities.

A new harbour has been built and four km (two and a half miles) of new beach created. A seafront highway, much of it underground to maintain open access to the city centre, will connect the village to Montjuic.

Athletes and officials in the village will have exclusive use of one of the beaches. For four weeks it will be the only private beach in Spain.

Beyond the new harbour wall a submarine breakwater will hold back stormy seas and underwater machinery should ensure that waste piped out to sea is not brought back in by the tide.

Dozens of giant cranes swing above what the builders claim is Europe's biggest construction site. The apartment houses, all a maximum six storeys high, are almost finished. The twin towers of what will be a bank and an office complex are the only high-rise buildings on the site.

The village is due to be handed over to COOB on January 1, 1992. The constructors are confident they will be on time.

The significance of the new development for Barcelona goes far beyond the Olympic Games. It will transform the city's relationship with the sea. Despite its importance as a port, Spain's second city has always lived with its back to sea. Apart from a small area round the port itself, the city was cut off from the seafront by railway tracks.

On the land between the railway and the sea stood only warehouses and factories. Now the tracks have been torn up and re-routed. Dilapidated docks and buildings have gone. "Barcelona has been opened up to the sea. This will change the nature of the city," said

Jose Angel Borlan, spokesman for the company with overall responsibility for infrastructure projects related to the Olympics.

After the Games the village will return to the city as a decidedly up-market residential area. Many of the apartments

have already been sold to private buyers, Borlan said.

He said the people of Barcelona had reacted to the upheaval caused by the construction projects with "positive resignation."

Basically people are proud of what is being done. They were well aware they were going to suffer a pretty miserable year or two but they know their city will be better at the end of it."

Financially, the Games should break even. Losses due to the falling value of the U. S. dollar have been largely offset by higher-than-budgeted income from television rights and by insuring trenches for revenue at fixed exchange rates.

"It has been very good business for the country," said mayor Maragall. "The profit for society has already been made."

But earlier optimistic financial estimates have had to be scaled down.

Less than six months ago the major was predicting the Games would make 500 million dollars profit double that of the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

OVERNIGHT LEARNER BIDS TO BE A SNOOKER CHAMPION

A player from Nicaragua came to snooker's richest tournament without a cue and saying "I've never played but I can try." Then he astounded onlookers with a break of 50, something many amateurs fail to achieve in a lifetime. Then a Thai player hit a 147 break and crushed a three-times world champion. These were just two of the extraordinary episodes that marked a tournament watched by viewers all over the world—by 30 million, reports Gemini News Service, in Thailand alone.

by BOB HOLMES
in Birmingham

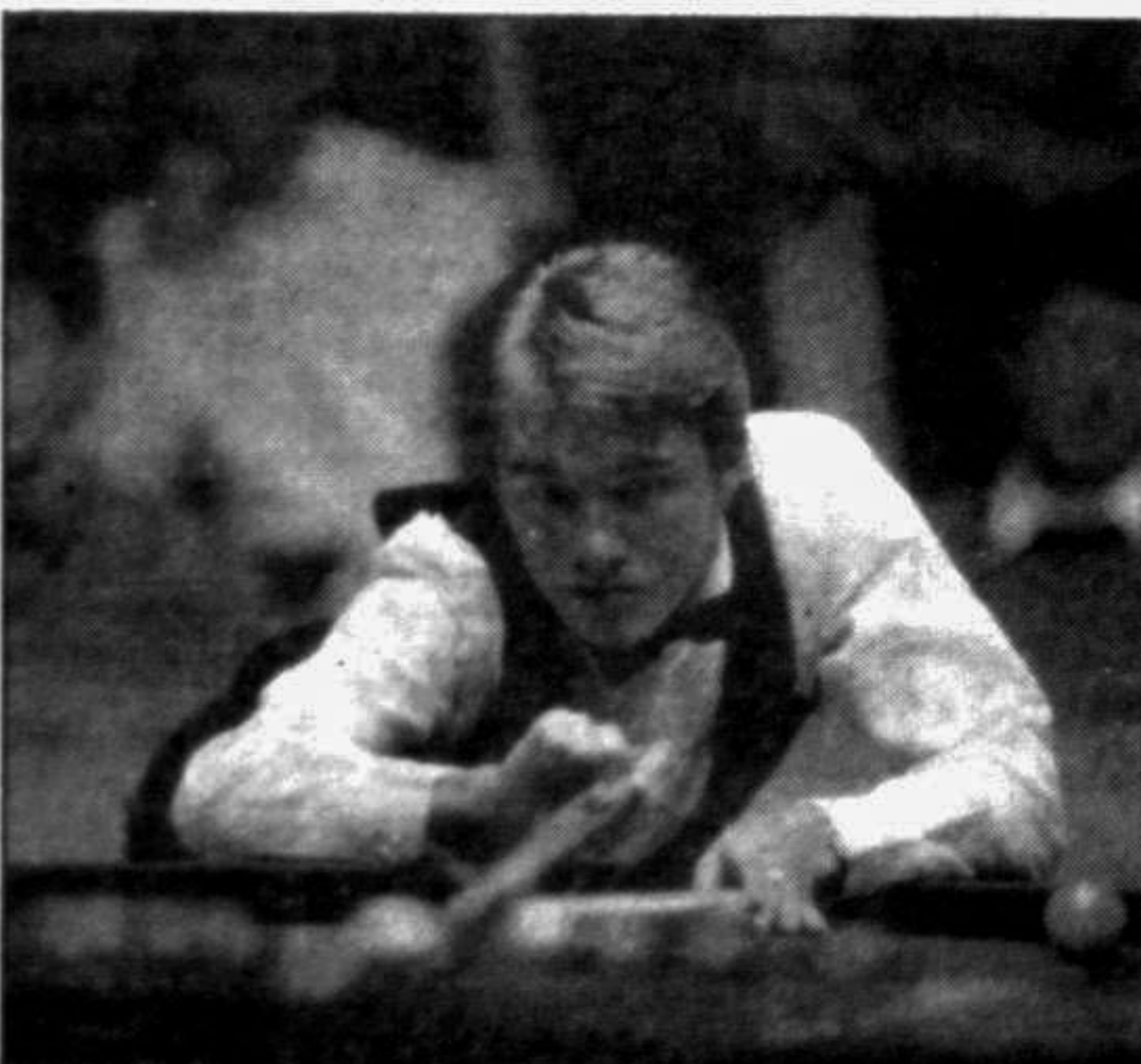
Even before Tony Drago of Malta and James Wattana of Thailand had reached the semi-finals of snooker's richest tournament, the 1m World Masters, the balance of power in this most British of sports had begun to change. On the first night of the two-week extravaganza, a one-legged Icelandic had crushed a three-times former world champion 6-1.

Brynjar Valdimarsson, conqueror of Britain's John Spencer, was then beaten by Udon Khatmuk, a billiard club owner from Bangkok, whose compatriot, Wattana, then hit a maximum 147 break and knocked out reigning world champion Stephen Hendry en route to the last four.

No wonder Frouse Saheed, chairman of the International Billiard and Snooker Federation, declared: "This event has opened the doors for all countries. Now you will see snooker take off around the globe. The tournament was wonderful—quite the best I've seen in 22 years of travelling around the world."

"It has been like Wimbledon and the Olympics rolled into one and completely justified our faith in the game's universal appeal. For instance, I think you will find that Japan, who were not even represented, will be a coming nation. Their association has only been in existence for a couple of years but they have done a lot of work."

The Maltese have been playing the game ever since



STEPHEN HENDRY... reigning world champion

British colonists introduced it to the Mediterranean islands at the turn of the century. The mastery of Drago was not as surprising as the mere competence shown by more recent recruits.

Billiards, pool and carom are played to a high standard in numerous corners of the globe, but the burgeoning appeal of snooker, the most complex and bewildering of the cue games, and the ability of newcomers to grasp its intricacies in a short time augur well for the future of the sport. One man almost got the hang of it overnight.

Juan Francisco Taylor Castaneda, a Nicaraguan pool

player living in Panama, wrote on his application form in Spanish "I have never played snooker but I can try."

He arrived at Heathrow equipped with only three words of English—and no cue. The plaintive cry of "Barry Hearn—Romford," got him to the promoter's home town and then to Birmingham. He still had to borrow a cue.

Playing Mohamed El Kamah, of Egypt, who duly dispatched him 6-0, Castaneda nevertheless astounded onlookers with one break of 50—something many amateurs fail to do in a lifetime at the table.

Indeed, he would have clinched a consolation frame had he been more au fait with the rules. Sadly, due to his affinity with American pool, where flukes are not allowed, he could not comprehend how El Kamah came to benefit from several unintentional but perfectly permissible pots.

Feeling cheated, Castaneda could not bring himself to shake hands at the end. Officials wondered: "What will he do when he's had some practice?"

Ashot Potikyan, of the Soviet Union, did not bring a cue either, but took a frame off Jyri Virtanen of Finland, who is more accustomed to a

heavyweight home game that visiting British professional Steve Newbury claimed "was played with cannon balls knocked around by fence posts."

Brazil's Rui Chapeu brought a touch of Great Gatsby style to the outer tables. He wore elegant white from cap to spat, and took three frames off former world amateur champion Paul Milford, of Malta.

Indika Dodangoda, a Sri Lankan student, took three frames from Tony Chappel, a semi-finalist in the Asian Open, while Malaysia's Sam Chong actually led winner Jimmy White by three frames to one.

Other unlikely nationalities had demonstrated that wielding a cue was not an exclusive preserve of the British and their ex-colonies.

Joels Jacobs of Namibia, Rudi Dykstra of Holland, Thomas Jaegg of Switzerland, and the irresistibly fruity pair of Bjorn L'Orange (Norway) and Lemmens (Belgium) all performed respectably, as did American pool players Jim Rempe and Mike Massey.

New star in Laudrup dynasty

One game remained to decide who would be the lucky winner of Europe's World Cup qualifying Group One.

Sparkling victories in Bulgaria and at home to Greece and Romania meant that the revamped young Danish side, including the precocious Brian Laudrup—brother of Barcelona's Michael, and Bayern Munich's pound-2 million summer buy from Bayer Uerdingen—looked set to be Italy-bound.

Few "experts" could see anything other than the Danes gleaming the point required to seal their second consecutive World Cup finals appearance as Romania and Denmark trooped on to the pitch on a sunlit afternoon in Bucharest.

After all, a month previously a rampant Denmark had majestically swept aside dispirited opponents by an emphatic 3-0 scoreline that decidedly flattered the Romanians.

Flying

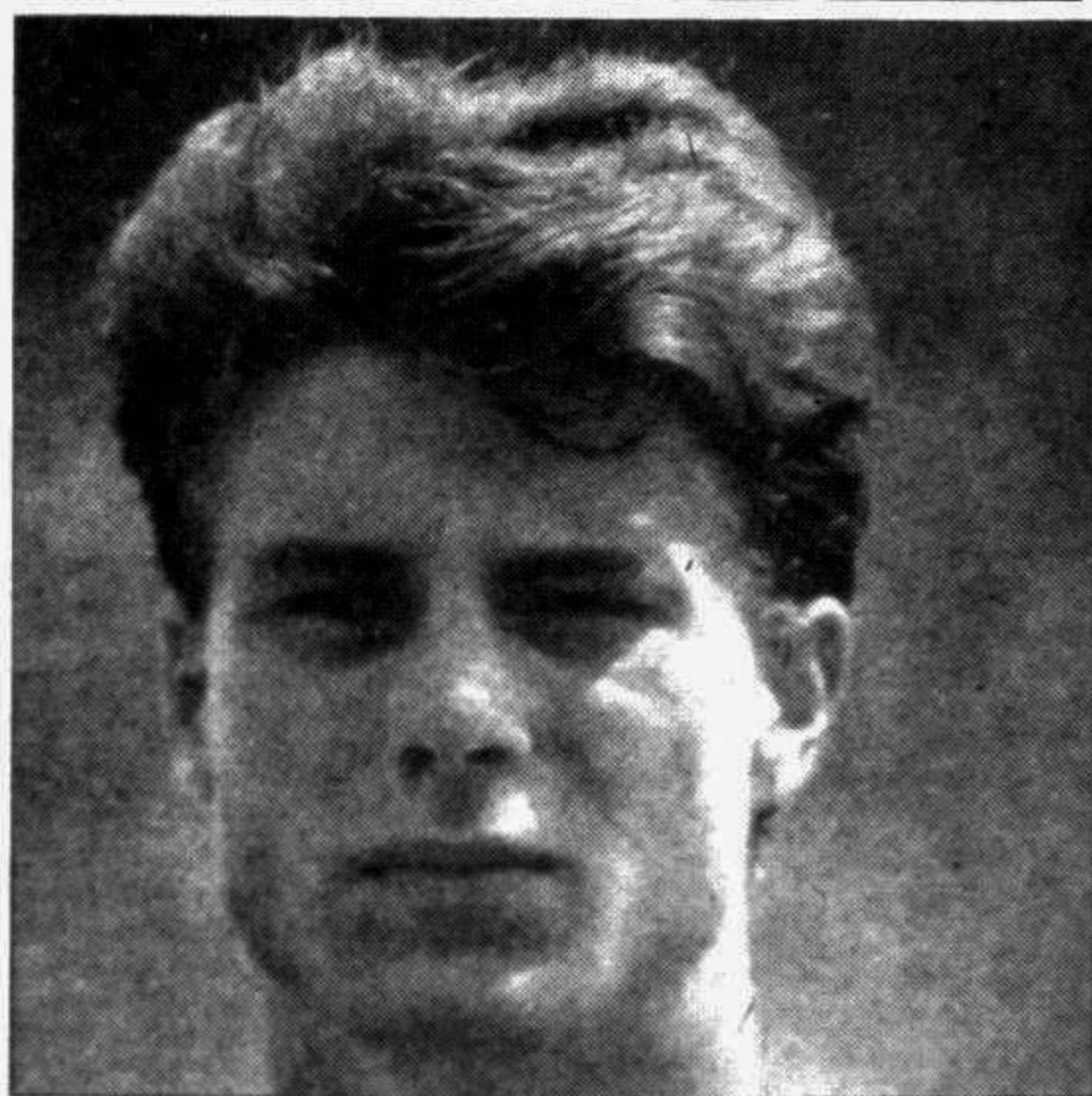
During that first tie a Copenhagen full house had marvelled at the sight of the young Laudrup flying down the flank as the overtly defensive Romanian game plan was put to the sword. Aston Villa's stopper, Kent Nielsen, had already opened the scoring when Brian Laudrup cut in from the left and drove splendidly past flailing goalkeeper Lung.

Salvos

The opening salvos of the return fixture at the 23 August Stadium again seemed to emphasise an apparent Gulf in class between the countries. After only seven minutes Brian Laudrup's imperious excursion past the defenders on the right preceded an accurate pull-back for Flemming Povlsen to put the visitors ahead.

They doggedly clawed their way back into contention, while Denmark conceded territorial superiority, three goals... and eventual qualification.

Football is a staple diet for the Laudrup family. Brian Laudrup, especially, is a bundle of talent and a real asset to Denmark... writes Nick Bidwell



BRIAN LAUDRUP... More ability than his talented but sometimes erratic brother Michael.

For Brian Laudrup one of the few Danes to do himself justice during that ill-fated 90 minutes—the chance to play in the World Cup finals at the tender age of 21 had evaporated, and with it the opportunity to enhance his growing reputation as an attacker of pace and guile.

Such sentiments are shared by one

"Brian has the same delicate touch on the ball as his brother and the penetrative force of Preben Elkjaer."

Danish soccer journalist, former international Flemming Nielsen.

"Brian has the same delicate touch on the ball as his brother and the penetrative force of Preben Elkjaer," he says.

"But unlike his father Finn—a former player—and Michael, whose technical gifts were both checked by inconsistency, Brian has a real professional mentality."

Career

Brian Laudrup was born in February 1969 in Vienna, where his father was playing for Sportklub. Subsequently Laudrup senior and his family returned to Denmark, where Finn completed his career with Brøndby in the Third Division and then graduated to club director during a decidedly satisfying period—the

team rose to prominence as the Danish top flight and his sons took their initial footballing steps.

While Michael left Brøndby in 1983 for Lazio—loaned to the Roman club by Juventus—Brian's willow wing play earned him a first-team debut, against Naestved in April 1987.

Mature performances with his club, the Danish Under 21 and Olympic teams meant that exactly a year later he joined Michael in the full national squad for a friendly versus Austria—in his birthplace.

Denmark lost 1-0 thanks to an own goal from Klaus Berggreen, but for Brian the game was a memorable experience. He won his first cap when leaving the bench in the second half, to replace Jesper Olsen.

Experience

"I plumped for Uerdingen for my first real professional experience because it's small town and there will not be a lot of pressure from spectators or media," Laudrup explained at the time.

"Here I'll be able to work at my game in peace. It's the perfect atmosphere for me to develop."

"Brian is too good for this team," said Uerdingen coach Horst Wohlers—who very nearly succeeded Piontek as Denmark's boss last spring.

Certainly the new Danish supremo, Richard Møller-Nielsen, will be looking to the likes of Brian Laudrup to reinforce the generally favourable impression created when the Danes just fell short of a World Cup berth.

They are drawn with Yugoslavia, Austria, Northern Ireland and the Faroe Islands in the European Championship and have every chance of qualification.

The next episode of the Laudrup dynasty could well be set on nearby Swedish soil.